[Medieval Georgia]

RELIGION

771 revered and neglected by their sanctimonious successors. The priest-mind took the rough clean spirit of the Founder and the rugged sacrifices of these old and dim-remembered men who found in it a divine message for humanity; and violent and abortive, cunning and obsequious, the priest-mind turned it into the sour wine of the Mediæval church.

794 It is difficult to appreciate the extent to which the Church checked the development of human knowledge during the Middle Ages. Education was the preserve of the Church in Georgia, as in other countries of the Christian East and West. The wealth and the intellectual monopoly of the Church attracted to it much of the best human material of each successive century. This material was physically sterilized in the monasteries and mentally sterilized in the copying and illumination of sacred books and in the development of bleak theses upon futile religious controversies. Georgian ecclesiastical literature produced nothing of intellectual value with the exception of certain parts of the Annals and some historical manuscripts, and through the pages of these works there runs the endless thread of priestly perversion of the truth to suit the moral reclamations—or more frequently the purely material designs on property—of the Church. It was left to the wild growth of the troubadour literature—evolved under the free-thinking influence of the Persian poets and the Classic philosophers—to express the natural art and creative genius of the Georgian spirit.

795 659 The Georgian Church remained always in close alliance with the Greek. At an early period Greek ecclesiasts were active in Georgia, and Georgian monks were numerous in Syria and Greece. The Georgian Church was originally subordinate to the Patriarchs of Antioch, but the Armenian Church exercised a closer influence on Georgian ritual and dogma, until, in the second half of the fifth century, the decisions of the Council of Chalchedon produced the Schism which led to the separation of the Armenian from the Greek Church. Thenceforward the Georgians, following in the train of Greek religious thought, carried on a long and often politically disastrous feud with the Armenians, although both David the Restorer and Tamara called Councils in an attempt to reconcile the dogmatic scruples of the contending priests. At the same time the Churches of Byzantium and Georgia were closely associated. The Byzantine Emperors endowed churches in Georgia, and made donations for the restoration of others

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including the Cathedral of Mtzkheta, while the Georgian kings assisted the considerable colonies of Georgian monks who settled in the Byzantine territories by the foundation and endowment of churches and monasteries on Mount Athos, at Antioch, Jerusalem, and on Mount Sinai.

The Georgian Church in two respects bears an important relation to the political history of the country. First Christianity, both in Zoroastrian and Mussulman days, represented the influence of Byzantium and the Christian West as opposed to that of Persia and the East. And the prosperity and power of the Church fluctuated according to the respective strength of Christendom and Islam. Secondly Georgia did not experience the struggle between Church and State which was taking place in other parts of Christendom. This fact must be attributed directly to the menace of Islam. The influence of the Church over the peasantry was too valuable to the King, and the armed protection of the King was too important to the Church, to allow either of them to attempt to weaken or dispense with the other. Thus when the Arab invasion drove the Iberian rulers over the Mountains of Likhi, the Catholicos of Mtzkheta followed them, while during the abeyance of the Bagratids, between the seventh and tenth centuries, the Catholicosate apparently lapsed. The revival of the Georgian monarchy saw the reappearance of a Catholicos at Mtzkheta and the rich endowment of churches and monasteries. While Henry II in England was wrangling with Thomas à-Becket, the Georgian kings were showering favours and privileges on their clergy.

During the great days of the Bagratid monarchy, the Georgian Church flourished and grew rich under the protection of and in alliance with the Crown.[1] And it is but rarely that that friction between the two dominant bodies in the state, which was troubling the politics of contemporary England and of the Western Empire, and which, under the Iconoclastic Emperors had arisen in Byzantium, is to be noted in the history of mediæval Georgia. David Aghmashenebeli indeed, carried out a drastic cleansing of the Church, but his conduct is approved by the monkish Annalists. Tamara supported by the nobles tried without success to remove the unpopular Catholicos Mikélo Mirionisdze, who "was generally detested,"[2] and both Giorgi IV Lasha and Dmitri II incurred

[1] See particularly Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 313–16, for the great acquisitions of property by the Church during the reign of Bagrat IV.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 423.

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the anger of the Catholicos of their time on account of their way of living.

The two powers of the Church and the Crown seem to have been virtually interdependent. The Catholicos and his bishops held wide lands and owned great numbers of serfs—"the sons of Mtzkheta". The Church property was free from taxation except in events of emergency, and the Catholicos enjoyed a share of state dues and in addition such perquisites as the takings of the toll-house at Gori and a tax on dye-houses. Many *mtavarni* and *aznaurni* were his vassals; and the levies from the estates of the Church went on campaign under their own commander, who was, in principle, independent of the royal surveillance. Together the Crown and the Church monopolized all the power and the greater part of the wealth of the country, and on terms of amity and confidence, the one supported the other. The King nominated a new Catholicos, and the Catholicos presided over the assembly of lords, spiritual and temporal, at the coronation of a new king.

> "An affront", says the Code of Wakhtangi, "of whatever nature it may be, made against the King or the Catholicos, is of equal gravity; for if the first is master of the body, the second is of the soul, and they have both received the consecration of God and men." [1]

Much of the wealth that poured into the country as a result of the consolidation of the monarchy and the successful wars against the Muslims, found its way into the hands of the ecclesiasts. Triumphant kings endowed the Church with new lands and further numbers of serfs, and successful soldiers minted their loot into richly bejewelled icons and the spoils of Muslim harims into sacerdotal plate.

Hundreds of churches and monasteries sprang up, constructed at great cost by architects, stone-masons and wood-carvers, many of whom were brought from Byzantium. The churches were full of gorgeous vestments, of rare illuminated holy books, of miraculous relics presented by noble devotees returned from the Holy Land,[2] of costly gold and silver vessels. At the boards of the Catholicos and of his bishops, holy men and their lay guests feasted to their full on the first fruits of the land. And the Church was chosen by the cadets of the aristocracy as a career more lucrative and more pleasing than service at the court, or in the trains of the great *didebulni*.

[1] Brosset, *H. de la G.*, Intro. et Add., p. cx. In the reign of Bagrat IV the Annalists refer to the Catholicos as "the Holy King Melkisideki" (I, 315).

[2] For an account of the curious relics in the possession of the Dadiani see Chardin, 1686 ed., p. 59.

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[64] [65] free medical service for working people, and the provision of a wide network of health resorts for the use of the working people.

[67] Art. 134. Citizens of the Georgian SSR have the right to education.

This right is ensured by universal and compulsory elementary education; by free education up to and including the seventh grade; by a system of state stipends for students of higher educational establishments who excel in their studies; by instruction in schools being conducted in the native language, and by the organization in the factories, state farms, machine and tractor stations and collective farms of free vocational, technical and agronomic training for the working people.

[562] Art. 135. Women in the Georgian SSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, government, cultural, political and other public activity.

The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured by women being accorded an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance, and education, by state protection of the interests of mother and child, state aid to mothers of large families and unmarried mothers, maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.

[563] Art. 136. Equality of rights of citizens of the Georgian SSR, irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, government, cultural, political and other activity is an indefeasible law.

Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or, conversely, the establishment of any direct or indirect privileges for, citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law.

[659] Art. 137. In order to ensure the citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the Georgian SSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.

Art. 138. In conformity with the interests of the working people, and in order to strengthen the socialist system, the citizens of the Georgian SSR are guaranteed by law:

a) freedom of speech;
b) freedom of press;
c) freedom of assembly, including the holding of mass meetings;
d) freedom of street processions and demonstrations.

These civil rights are ensured by placing at the disposal of the working people and their organizations printing presses, stocks of paper, public buildings, the streets, communications facilities and other material requisites for the exercise of these rights.

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sians imposed such an onerous tax on cattle and trees that, five years later, the army of Nadir Shah was beset by famine. But the Persian exactions continued, until in 1747 the King of Karthalinia effected a kind of general strike by withdrawing all the working population into the hills and strong places. Lastly, in consequence of the wars, the people were frequently subjected to a special tax, enduring over a period of years, the proceeds of which were spent in the repair of churches and castles and in the redemption of slaves.

In two respects the Church in Georgia bears an important relation to the political history of the country. Firstly, Christianity, both in Zoroastrian and Mussulman days, represented the influence of Byzantium and the West as opposed to that of Persia and the East. And the prosperity and power of the Church fluctuated according to the respective strength of Christendom and Islam. Secondly, Georgia did not experience the struggle between Church and State which was taking place in other parts of Christendom. This fact must be attributed directly to the menace of Islam. The influence of the Church with the peasantry was too valuable to the King, and the armed protection of the King was too important to the Church, to allow of either of them attempting to weaken or dispense with the other. The revival of the Georgian monarchy saw the reappearance of a Catholicos at Mtzkhet, and the rich endowment of churches and monasteries. While Henry II in England was wrangling with Thomas à Becket, the Georgian Kings were showering favours and privileges on their clergy. The Catholicos and his bishops held wide lands and owned great numbers of slaves; many nobles were the vassals of Mtzkhet. Besides this, the clergy were free from all taxation, being liable only to contribute in a national emergency.

During the great days of the Bagratid monarchy the Church flourished and grew rich, under the protection of and in alliance with the Crown. But rarely do we note traces of that friction between the two dominant bodies in the State which was disturbing the politics of Western Christendom. The Catholicos, indeed, was recognised virtually as the equal of the King, and his feudal levies were commanded by an independent General, nominated by himself.

The two powers seem to have been interdependent; the King nominated a new Catholicos; the Catholicos presided over the Assembly of lords and bishops at the coronation of a new King. Together the King and the Church monopolised the greater part of the wealth of the country. Hundreds of

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churches and monasteries sprang up, constructed at great cost by architects, stonemasons and woodcarvers imported from Byzantium. The churches were full of gorgeous vestments, of rare illuminated holy books, of miraculous relics presented by noble devotees returned from the Holy Land, of costly gold and silver vessels. At the boards of the Catholicos and of his bishops holy men and their lay guests feasted to their full on the first fruits of the land. And the Church was chosen by the cadets of the aristocracy as a career more lucrative and more pleasing than service at the Court, or in the trains of the great *didebuls*.

With the fall of the national monarchy and the predominance of the Mussulman powers began the decline of the Georgian Church. The Turkish capture of Constantinople severed all connection with the Greeks, who had so profoundly influenced every aspect of Georgian religious life, its doctrines, its rites and its architecture. Finally when the Georgian Kingdom split, the Church split too. The influence and efficiency of the clergy speedily declined. All the European travellers in Georgia during the seventeenth century unite in condemning their ignorance, their drunkenness, their immorality and their levity. The bishops were hardly to be distinguished from the ordinary feudal proprietors, and their seats were bought and sold by, or conferred as rewards upon, the relatives of the different ruling princes. The aristocracy, demoralised by the humiliating political conditions which often compelled them to embrace Islam, and forced them to send their sons in hostage to be educated by the Mullahs of Isfahan, or to give their daughters into Persian or Turkish harîms, had assumed a cynical indifference towards their religion. They combined Mussulman polygamy with Christian drunkenness, and interested themselves in either religion only to the extent of celebrating, with admirable impartiality, the feast-days of both.

Only among the peasantry and the artisan class did any true religious sentiment survive, and this for the most part took the form of national feeling against the Persians. For the rest, the peasants clung to a number of superstitions dignified with the name of Christianity. But the churches were in ruins and for the most part unfrequented. Chardin has something cynical to say about their condition: "Les Géorgiens . . . ont une coûtume assez étrange de bâtir la plupart des églises sur le haut des montagnes. . . . On les voit et on les salue en cet éloignement, de trois ou quatre lieues; mais on n'y va jamais; et l'on peut bien assurer que la plupart

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S. G. 779 the life of St. Shushanik († 474). The Georgian text of the gospels as it is used until today in divine worship goes back to a revision after the Greek by the Hagiorite Euthymius († 1028); a copy of an older text shows that the Georgian gospels originally were translated from Armenian and afterwards were revised according to the Greek.

S. G. 795 659 The Georgian Orthodox church, which always represented the influence of Byzance and of the West as opposed to that of Persia and the East, has not known serious conflicts with the State, due to the continuous menace of Islam to both. The autocephaly of the Georgian Church was violated by the Russians in 1810, the office of Katholikos being abolished. It was restored in 1917; since then, the fate of the Georgian church has been the same as that of other religious organizations in the USSR.